

59
US EPA RECORDS CENTER REGION 5



401399

Chicago Tribune

Sunday, November 16, 1980

State to crack down on toxic waste dumps

By George de Lama

GOV. THOMPSON announced Saturday the creation of a special investigative unit to lead a crackdown on the illegal dumping of toxic chemical wastes in Illinois.

Admitting that "Illinois has had a poor history of disposing of hazardous waste material," Thompson also announced a series of legislative and administrative proposals aimed at curbing waste disposal abuses.

Flanked by three state department heads in a news conference here, Thompson said the investigative team will have 25 agents and will come under the authority of the Illinois Department of Law Enforcement.

Named "Hazmin," short for "Hazardous Material Investigations," the new unit will cost about \$1.4 million per year, "an exception to the austerity budget of next year," Thompson said.

THE NEW UNIT won't come into existence until mid-1981, said James Zagel, head of the Law Enforcement Department, because of Thompson's 90-day state hiring freeze, scheduled to expire in January. However, investigators for

● The EPA finally fences off Cahokia's "Burning Ditch" waste dump site where the ground "seems to melt." Page 5.

the unit will be hired even if the freeze should be extended beyond then, Thompson said.

The governor's action followed a series of investigations by the news media, including one published by The Tribune in July, on the hazardous waste problem in Illinois.

Tribune environment editor Casey Bukro reported that illicit dumping by so-called "midnight dumpers" and other renegade waste haulers is widespread in metropolitan Chicago.

Authorities have discovered 11 illegal toxic waste dumps in the Chicago area, five inside the city limits, The Tribune revealed. Some are in highly populated neighborhoods where residents were unaware of the dangers of poisoning, fire, or explosion.

ILLINOIS IS IN a second-place tie with Ohio among the nation's top hazardous waste producers at a time when

careless toxic waste disposal is considered the country's biggest environmental problem, the series reported.

Thompson disclosed a variety of other measures Saturday aimed at illicit chemical dumping, including:

● Plans to draft legislation for the next session of the General Assembly giving state Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) inspectors authority to impose "on-the-spot" fines of up to \$10,000 to operators of licensed dumping sites engaging in illegal activities, such as accepting unlicensed waste material.

Administrative and legal appeals procedures will be written into the bill, which Thompson said would especially hit the practice of "short-cutting," or dumping the material first and obtaining a license later.

● A proposal to increase fees for dumping hazardous wastes by "double, at the minimum," to provide the state with sufficient funding to clean up "orphan sites," or those without clear ownership.

Though this proposal was rejected by the legislature last year, Thompson said the state needs more than the roughly \$280,000 in fees it receives for this function each year.

● A "kick in the behind" for the Illinois Pollution Control Board to get it to finally adopt new regulations for the hauling of sludge. It has deliberated more than three years on the matter. "Three years is a long time," he said, "and we will inquire why it took so long."

APPEARING WITH Thompson, Illinois Atty. Gen. Fahner announced that he will propose legislation to make producers of waste material share responsibility for its final disposition with haulers and dump site operators.

Currently, producers often allow the lowest bidder to haul away their hazardous chemicals without worrying about where the chemicals wind up, Fahner said.

He also proposed that operators of toxic and hazardous waste disposal sites be personally licensed in addition to having licenses for the sites. This would help the state identify operators with criminal backgrounds or records of disposal abuses.

Combined with legislation signed into law in September, Thompson said, the new measures would "go a long way towards curing the illegal dumping problem in Illinois."